

Information for Parents or Carers – Child Protection Case Conferences

We know being involved in the child protection system can be a stressful time for families. It's important you have an understanding of what is going on and what is happening at every stage and why, and also know where you can get independent help and support.

What is a Child Protection Case Conference?

Sometimes following a child protection investigation, it is necessary to have a multi-agency meeting involving you and those working with you to discuss what has been happening and ensure plans are in place to help to protect your child, manage any risks and meet any identified wellbeing needs. This meeting will also consider whether or not there is the need to place your child's name on the Child Protection Register.

These meetings are known as Initial Child Protection Case Conferences. The meeting's purpose is to allow people to share information about a child for whom there are child protection concerns; jointly assess that information and the risk to the child; and determine whether there is a likelihood of significant harm through abuse or neglect that needs to be addressed through a multi-agency Child's Plan.

Who will be there?

The meeting will be chaired by a senior person experienced in child protection. Also attending the meeting will be key professionals who have knowledge of your child and family. These may include:

- Social workers
- School staff
- Health Visitor/Family Nurse/School Nurse
- Nursery staff
- GP
- Police
- Voluntary organisations

You will be invited to attend the meeting. Where it is considered age appropriate, your child will be invited to the meeting. In every case we will ensure that the meeting includes either your child's views or observations from people who know and have been working with them.

At the discretion of the Chair, you can bring someone to support you, such as a family member, friend, or an advocacy worker. Your contribution is very important to this meeting and your views will be listened to.

The Meeting

At the meeting there will also be a full discussion about what has happened and why there was a need for a child protection investigation. During the meeting, the professionals attending will provide a written report about their knowledge of and involvement with you and your family. Everyone, including you, will have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and ask any questions.

When everyone has had an opportunity to contribute, decisions will be made about what should happen next. Your child's wellbeing will always be at the centre of any decisions made.

The main priority is to make sure your child is safe and will be properly cared for. It's also important that, if you need help to do this, appropriate support is made available.

Will my child's name be placed on the Child Protection Register?

At the Initial Child Protection Conference, one of the things that will be considered is whether or not your child's name should be placed on the Child Protection Register. All areas in Scotland have a register of children who are identified as being at risk of harm or neglect. It is a way of identifying children for whom there are serious concerns about their safety. Where there are reasonable grounds to believe or suspect that your child has suffered or will suffer significant harm from abuse or neglect, and that a Child Protection Plan is needed to protect and support them, their details will be placed on the Child Protection Register.

Access to the Child Protection Register is strictly controlled. However, information will be shared with other agencies involved with you and your child, such as health, education, nurseries etc. Information shared is strictly on a 'need to know' basis.

What is a Child's Plan?

If your child's name is placed on the Child Protection Register, a Child's Plan will be agreed and a Lead Professional identified. In Child Protection situations this will be a Social Worker. The Child's Plan sets out what needs to be done to reduce the risk of future harm and offers support to you and your child. The plan will say what is being done, who by, timescales and expected outcome.

Information on Core Groups

If your child's name has been placed on the Child Protection Register, you along with a small number of key professionals will be expected to work together on your Child's Plan to address the issues that raised concerns about your child's safety, as well as dealing with any other identified needs. Core Group Meetings will be held to make sure progress is being made.

The first core group meeting will be arranged shortly after registration has been decided. While your child is on the register core group meetings will take place on a regular basis of around every 4 to 6 weeks.

You will be invited to attend these meetings and have your say. It is important that you and your child are fully involved in decisions that affect you both. Depending on your child's age and understanding they may also be a member of the core group.

The core group will be led by social work and involve other key professionals who work with you and your child. This might include health visitors, school nurses, teachers or any others who can help to provide support to ensure your child is kept safe and their needs are met. When the group meets they will look at your Child's Plan and consider how things are getting on to make sure that the level of risk and areas of concern are being reduced.

The plan will say what is being done, who by, timescales for this and the expected outcome. These things will be discussed during meetings of the core group. It is likely that there will be things that you are expected to do and workers will help to make sure that you understand what is being asked and provide any other help as is needed.

When will the plan be reviewed?

Three months after your child has been placed on the Child Protection Register there is a formal meeting to review this decision. This meeting is known as the Review Child Protection Conference. The purpose of the review meeting is to look at what has changed and if there is still a need to have your child's name on the register. The meeting will be very similar to the initial one where your child was registered. You will be allowed to have your say at the meeting. Depending on their age and understanding your child may be invited to the meeting. In every case we will ensure that the meeting includes either your child's views or observations from people who know and have been working with them.

At the end of the meeting a decision will be taken about whether there is still a need to keep your child's name on the register. If it is decided that registration is to continue the Core Group will carry on dealing with the Child Protection Plan and a further Review Child Protection Conference will take place between three and six monthly periods or earlier if circumstances change. If it is decided that registration is no longer required then support to you and your child will still continue if it is needed. There may be a Child's Plan, which will be discussed and reviewed at multi-agency meetings.

Where families can get help

If you feel you need legal advice on what you and your child's rights are, you can contact:

- A solicitor (Legal Aid may be available) www.slab.org.uk
- The Scottish Child Law Centre www.sclc.org.uk
- Independent Advocacy in Aberdeenshire - Advocacy North East www.advocacyne.org.uk